

Supporting Diverse Populations Within the Early Childhood Workforce Podcast

Narrator: Welcome to "Head Start TALKs," where big ideas support your everyday experiences.

Awuse Tama: My name is Awuse Tama, and I am with the National Center on Early Childhood Development Teaching and Learning, also known as NCECDTL. I also have with me here today Michelle Adkins, also with the NCECDTL. Today we'll be chatting about a resource compilation called "Supporting Diverse Populations Within the Early Childhood Workforce." As more Head Start in child care settings in more diverse populations of children and families in your program, it's important to understand how to best serve them through culturally responsive practices and policies. So, in this podcast, we really want to talk with you not only about the research itself, but also how you can use this research in your work-supporting programs. So, Michelle, welcome. Let's begin by talking about why it was important to pull this resource compilation together.

Michelle Adkins: Thanks, Awuse. Well, as you mentioned in the introduction, our country is becoming more diverse. More and more programs are working with families and children from different cultures, and many of them speak different languages. You know, more children under the age of 6 are speaking and hearing languages other than English at home, and one out of five school-age children speak a language other than English at home. So, we just need to be prepared to educate children who come from different cultures and who may speak languages other than English.

Awuse: What kind of challenges and opportunities will the early childhood workforce face in working with a diverse population?

Michelle: That's a great question. Thanks, Awuse. And you're right that there are both challenges and opportunities in this work. One of the biggest challenges we face is our ability as a workforce to understand diverse populations, and to effectively meet their needs. But luckily, that also presents an opportunity, because there are resources out there that have been developed by others who have already met this challenge. So, for example, one of the resources we highlight in the compilation is a planned language approach. This is a comprehensive, systematic way for programs to support language and literacy for all children, but there's also a special focus on children who are dual language learners and how to incorporate language and literacy practices that enrich their language experiences. PLA has a focus on the importance of home language support as children's home language is fundamental to their learning. In fact, research shows that young children who are dual language learners are more successful in school — and later in life — when they are helped to develop strong language and literacy skills in their home language and English. PLA presents an opportunity for programs to support teachers and other program staff as they build their confidence and their competence to implement culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

Awuse: Can you tell us about the research compilation, and also give us an example of some more of the resources that are included?

Michelle: I'd love to, Awuse. Thanks. When we were gathering the resources for this resource compilation, we discovered that, really, resources were divided into two sort of content areas. The first area highlighted resources that were related to the early childhood workforce itself. So, like, recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. And the second content area was really highlighting resources that would help our existing workforce support diverse children and families. One of the resources we highlight is called "Supporting a Diverse and Culturally Competent Workforce, Charting Progress for Babies in the Child Care Research-Based Rationale." This is written by the Center for Law and Social Policy, and it provides a research basis — or a foundation — for why we should be recruiting, retaining, and supporting diverse and culturally sensitive infant and toddler teachers. Another resource we highlight is from the Council for Professional Recognition is, "Diversity and Inclusion and Early Care in Education," and this resource really explores and digs into the changing demographics in our country, and how it's impacting our early childhood education. Another resource, or another example, is the Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018, and this is from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, and this is a great resource because it gives you state-by-state information. Also, information about earnings and economic-security data. So, it's got a lot of information about the workforce itself and the conditions under which they're working. In the Supporting Diverse Children and Families section, we have several resources. One of them is where we highlight the core knowledge and competencies, or CKCs, from three states — New Jersey, Alaska, and Texas. And these are CKCs that are related to serving diverse populations. So, as you know, CKCs define what early childhood professionals should know and be able to do. These three states have done a really good job of incorporating the needs of teachers to be able to support children and families from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Awuse: Thank you, Michelle. I think you've hit upon some really great resources that help support regional or state technical assistance specialists and program staff in supporting a diverse population. Now, I'm really intrigued by these core competencies. So, what would you say are some of the core competencies that states are using to support diverse populations?

Michelle: The CKCs from these three states indicate what professionals need to know about how cultural, social, linguistic, and developmental diversity influences things like child development, approaches to learning, and so on, and how that understanding can help the teacher to be more responsive to children and families in early childhood settings. The CKCs cover practices, too, like how staff can consider and incorporate each child's culture, home language, and individual abilities, family contexts, and community in their daily interactions, activities, and learning experiences.

Awuse: These all sound like great resources for state and programs to use to understand the diversity of your EC workforce, as well as the children and families that are in your program. So, what are some additional examples of some of these resources?

Michelle: Under both content areas, we highlight resources in professional and workforce development, policy development, and even presentations and toolkits. The resources falling under the category of professional and workforce development look at the changing demographics and how they impact early childhood education — from recruiting and retaining

staff to ensuring professional development as culturally and linguistically appropriate to building the workforce's capacity to educate dual language learners. The resources under the category of policy development examine the implications for developing policies to support a diverse workforce, and offer some examples of how to improve policies related to language access, training, and professional development. In the presentations and toolkits section, you'll find resources on equity in the early childhood workforce, as well as promising practices for supporting dual language learners.

Awuse: Under these three categories — professional workforce development, policy development, presentations and toolkits — how can ECE specialists provide training and technical assistance to Head Start and/or child care programs, incorporate this information into their work?

Michelle: You know, Awuse, that's a very important question. I think one of the ways that TA and program staff can use this information is to simply increase their own awareness of the changing demographics in their states and programs 'cause this will impact professional development, family-engagement programs, and even how programs hire and train staff. However, you know, the implications really go deeper than the numbers. It also extends to how we design and deliver programs and services. The reality is, the early care and education system may be one of the first systems that families interact with, so helping states and programs set policies that result in a more diverse workforce, one that reflects the cultures and languages of the children and families they serve, and a workforce that feels confident in implementing culturally and linguistically responsive practice will help us all achieve positive outcomes for all children and families.

Awuse: Thank you very much, Michelle. So, today, we talked about a new resource compilation on supporting diverse populations within the early childhood workforce. We've highlighted several of these resources and how regional and state training assistance specialists and programs can use them to better serve diverse families and children. It is important to understand the diversity of families and children because we are becoming a more diverse workforce, and the children and their families we serve may come from a variety of cultural backgrounds that speak different languages than ourselves.

Narrator: Thank you for joining "Head Start TALKs." For more information on what you heard today, visit the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or ECLKC, at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov.